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Viewing cable 05ASUNCION1480, PARAGUAY'S INTERIOR: RELATIVE CALM AMID

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- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05ASUNCION1480	2005-12-05 20:33	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Asuncion

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.abc.com.py/nota/reclutaban-extremistas-de-catequesis-catolica>

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

46778,12/5/2005 20:33,05ASUNCION1480,"Embassy Asuncion",SECRET,05ASUNCION1329,"This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full", "S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 ASUNCION 001480

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO USAID LAC/AA
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD BARBARA MOORE
NSC FOR SUE CRONIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2015
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [EAGR](#) [SNAR](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: PARAGUAY'S INTERIOR: RELATIVE CALM AMID
PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC INSECURITY

REF: A. ASUNCION 1329

- [1](#)B. ASUNCION 1181
- [1](#)C. ASUNCION 1012
- [1](#)D. ASUNCION 0307
- [1](#)E. ASUNCION 0087
- [1](#)F. 04 ASUNCION 1449

Classified By: PolOff Mark A. Stamilio, reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: PolOff traveled to the conflictive Departments of Caaguazu and San Pedro 11/21 - 11/22. The Governor of Caaguazu told PolOff that his top priority was to address insecurity -- or at least public perceptions of insecurity -- by establishing a regional police academy and a mounted police force. XXXXXXXXXXXX for the cities of Coronel Oviedo, Caaguazu and Villarica described the recruitment practices of "radicalized campesinos," and opined that "liberated zones" (where the state is virtually absent) existed in the region to the extent that outsiders could not enter certain areas controlled by campesino groups without those groups' permission. In the Department of San Pedro, the Mayor of Lima touted his municipality's successes in replacing marijuana cultivation with a number of alternative crops. He was pleased that the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) had arranged to conduct a Medical Readiness and Training Exercise (MEDRETE) in Lima in March. XXXXXXXXXXXX for the departmental capital, San Pedro de Ycuamandyyu, described how official corruption and a general lack of resources and support hindered the administration of justice. XXXXXXXXXXXX described the more radical campesinos in San Pedro as "militarized," and expressed concern about possible unrest in January, when XXXXXXXXXXXX expects to indict four campesino leaders. End Summary.

Governor of Caaguazu Focused on Perceptions of Insecurity

[1](#)2. (SBU) On 11/21, PolOff met with Caaguazu Governor Enzo Cardozo in the departmental capital of Coronel Oviedo, located 85 miles east of Asuncion. Cardozo noted that his administration's resources were limited, so he had to prioritize the programs he would pursue. He said his top priority was to address insecurity -- or at least public perceptions of insecurity -- in his department. Cardozo did not cite any statistics to show that crime had risen in recent years. Rather, he noted that his constituents felt insecure (many of them pining for the "security" of the Stroessner era, he added), so he chose addressing their concerns about security as his administration's primary focus.

[1](#)3. (U) Cardozo took PolOff to visit his showpiece project for addressing insecurity, a regional Paraguayan National Police (PNP) academy on the outskirts of Coronel Oviedo. The academy was inaugurated in 2004, and is the country's first ever outside of Asuncion. The cadets who attend the academy hail from Caaguazu and three neighboring departments. Cardozo said he hopes to reach an agreement with the PNP to increase the number of graduates who return to their home communities to work after completing their training. He also hopes to convince the neighboring departments to assist Caaguazu with funding for the program in the future. In addition to the police academy, Cardozo proposes to have mounted police patrolling the department's cities as a means to demonstrate his commitment to addressing residents' concerns about security.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Cardozo said his second priority was to create employment for young people entering the job market. He lamented the influx of recent graduates to Caaguazu's cities with no real employment prospects, and expressed a desire to

create new sources of "urban employment." He did not offer any detailed plans for implementing such a scheme.

15. (SBU) Bio Note: In addition to being Governor of Caaguazu, Cardozo is Vice President of the Liberal Party (PLRA). He was elected Governor in 2003. He is a lawyer by trade, and appears to be in his mid- to late-thirties. He seems very much the politician -- more of a grip-and-grin mover-and-shaker than an intellectual heavy-hitter. He was pleased to have a USG visitor, and mentioned that he had requested an appointment with the Ambassador some time ago. End Bio Note.

XXXXXXXXXXXX Describes Radical Groups' Recruitment Practices ...

16. (SBU) PolOff met separately with XXXXXXXXXXXX, the XXXXXXXXXXXX for Coronel Oviedo, Caaguazu and Villarica, at his office in the city of XXXXXXXXXXXX. During the meeting, XXXXXXXXXXXX described the recruitment practices of "radicalized campesinos" in the Departments of Caaguazu, San Pedro and Caazapa.

17. (SBU) XXXXXXXXXXXX said radical members of the Patria Libre Party (PPL), the left-wing extremist movement responsible for kidnapping and murdering former President Raul Cubas' daughter Cecilia Cubas in 2004-2005 (refs A and B), routinely visit Catholic catechism classes in search of students who demonstrate a tendency to question authority or show an inclination toward extremist views. They typically select five to ten recruits from each class, put them through an initial indoctrination to determine which ones accept or espouse the most extreme views, and then further indoctrinate the most radical recruits to groom them for future leadership positions within the organization. XXXXXXXXXXXX said the PPL employs such recruitment practices on a continuous basis, constantly replenishing their ranks and grooming new leaders. Thus, when PPL leaders Juan Arrom and Anuncio Marti fled the country for Brazil in 2003 (while under investigation for the 2001 kidnapping of Maria Edith Bordon de Debernardi (ref A)), PPL faction leader Osmar Martinez took the helm; and now that Martinez is in jail pending trial for Ms. Cubas' kidnapping and murder, someone else will step right in to take his place.

18. (S) Comment: Although Arrom and Marti's absence from Paraguay may have enabled Martinez and his militant PPL faction to act independently, sensitive reporting indicates that Arrom retains overall control of the party. There is some evidence that Arrom and Martinez were at odds over the latter's plans to kidnap Ms. Cubas, and that Marti attempted to mediate the dispute. End Comment.

19. (SBU) XXXXXXXXXXXX said he learned about such groups' recruitment practices by talking to people in the countryside who have witnessed them first-hand. He added that he has interviewed the parents and siblings of Aldo and Magna Meza, a brother-sister PPL duo involved in the Debernardi kidnapping, and "the entire family" appears to have been educated "beyond what is normal for someone of their (campesino) background" and indoctrinated in "radical ideology." XXXXXXXXXXXX said the same holds true for Antonio and Jorge Galeano, who hail from the remote town of Vagueria in Caaguazu Department and lead the radical People's Agrarian Movement (Movimiento Agrario y Popular, or MAP). In June, two campesinos were killed and one was seriously wounded in a dispute over land claimed by Brazilian immigrant landowners in the vicinity of the Tekojoja settlement, near Vagueria (ref B).

110. (S) Comment: Sensitive reporting indicates that Aldo Meza received FARC training, and that his sister Magna may have, as well. End Comment.

111. (SBU) XXXXXXXXXXXX did not know who funded the activities of these radical campesino groups. However, he noted that certain Catholic Church officials lent their "unconditional support" to the campesino movement, and that the Bishop of Caaguazu "frequently pays off local officials to get campesinos released from jail." Additionally, when PolOff asked about the presence of Cuban doctors in the region, XXXXXXXXXXXX said Cuban doctors were working in Vagueria and other highly conflictive areas in neighboring Caazapa Department. He could not say whether the doctors were involved in political activities.

112. (SBU) Comment: The former Bishop of San Pedro, Monsignor Fernando Lugo, is an outspoken advocate for campesino groups (ref E). Some charge him with fomenting rural violence. Church leaders forced him to resign as Bishop in January, within one year after he was admonished in writing for failing to follow Episcopal guidelines. His prominent role in supporting campesino land seizures during several months of rural unrest in late 2004 may have been the last straw. A pair of San Pedro ranchers told PolOff that they have noted a significant decrease in radical campesino activity since Lugo resigned and relocated to another department. End Comment.

... and So-Called "Liberated Zones"

113. (SBU) XXXXXXXXXXXX opined that "liberated zones" (where the state is virtually absent) existed in the region to the extent that outsiders could not enter certain areas controlled by campesino groups without those groups' permission. XXXXXXXXXXXX said, for example, that he could not enter certain areas to investigate crimes without a sizable police escort. If he were to show up unescorted, he would be "turned around" -- i.e., physically denied access to the area. If he were to show up with "a sizable police escort," on the other hand, the campesinos would grant him access to the area and "treat him like an honored guest, inviting him to sit and drink traditional 'tereré' and talk at length" -- all of which, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, was a facade to make it appear that the campesinos were cooperating with the authorities. Likewise, campesinos allow police officers they know to enter such areas. An unfamiliar police officer, however, would be confronted and denied access.

114. (SBU) XXXXXXXXXXXX could not say whether these "liberated zones" existed to prevent the government from controlling campesino activities generally, to hide and protect marijuana plantations more specifically, or for some other reason. He said, however, that marijuana cultivation had always been a problem in the region, so the fact that marijuana was being cultivated there would not explain the more recent establishment of "liberated zones."

115. (C) Comment: Political commentators have used the term

"liberated zone" to mean a wide variety of things (ref D). In the context of Paraguay, it does not refer to territory ruled by guerrillas, as in Colombia. We have seen no hard evidence of a significant armed presence or guerrilla training camps in Paraguay's countryside. End Comment.

¶16. (SBU) Bio Note: XXXXXXXXXXXX appears to be a seasoned and knowledgeable XXXXXXXXXXXX, and a serious, honest and upright XXXXXXXXXXXX. He is a self-described campesino who hails from the town of XXXXXXXXXXXX, in XXXXXXXXXXXX Department. XXXXXXXXXXXX said he values his family's reputation and good name more than any fortune he could amass by abusing his position of authority. He expressed disgust for two employees in his office in Caaguazu who he believes are using their authority to extort bribes. XXXXXXXXXXXX said he uses his campesino roots to his advantage in investigating cases, donning a baseball cap or traditional straw hat when he goes out to talk to locals, and conversing with them in native Guaraní. The XXXXXXXXXXXX also takes advantage of XXXXXXXXXXXX access to locals, relying on him to negotiate with campesino groups that invade or threaten to invade private land. End Bio Note.

Mayor of Lima Touts Municipality's Successes

¶17. (U) On 11/22, PolOff, EconOff, and USAID Deputy Mission Director met with Julio Franco, the Mayor of Lima, in San Pedro Department, to deliver a book donation for an agriculture school the Ambassador visited in August, in the remote community of Carumbey, which is located approximately 185 miles north of Asuncion (ref C). PolOff took advantage of the meeting with Franco to discuss the security situation in Lima.

¶18. (U) Franco insisted that San Pedro's reputation for rural unrest and insecurity did not hold true in Lima. He said the situation was fairly heated there in 1999-2000, but the civic-minded residents of his municipality resisted the influx of narco-mafioso types and drove them out of town. He claimed marijuana cultivation was way down since then, and that, with his administration's help, residents had identified a number of alternative crops to grow and sell. Franco admitted that some residents continued to grow marijuana, but claimed they were a small minority. He said there were no "liberated zones" in Lima, claiming that he could go anywhere he wanted, whenever he wanted, without police escort.

¶19. (U) Franco said "everyone in Lima has a vegetable garden now" and people no longer rely on local merchants to bring in staples such as mandioca (manioc). He showcased a large, red onion as an example of a crop that, until recently, no one thought would grow in the region's soil. Likewise, the residents of Carumbey are growing and selling a wide variety of herbs and the natural sweetener stevia, products Franco previously touted as alternatives to growing marijuana (ref C).

¶20. (SBU) Comment: A pair of San Pedro ranchers with whom the Embassy has regular contact took issue with Franco's claims, telling PolOff that Lima continues to be a major source of marijuana. It is difficult to gauge which version is more accurate. The ranchers' interests diverge with the Mayor's. DEA does not have any specific information regarding marijuana cultivation in Lima. End Comment.

¶21. (SBU) Note: Franco was pleased that the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) had arranged to conduct a Medical Readiness and Training Exercise (MEDRETE) in Lima in March. He said local hospitals are stretched thin and have to send patients to the regional hospital, which, in turn, becomes overburdened and has to send patients to Asuncion. End Note.

¶22. (SBU) Bio Note: Franco is a member of the ruling Colorado Party (ANR). He is an agronomist by trade. He appears to be in his mid- to late-thirties, and purportedly speaks English. He welcomes Embassy visits and USG assistance for his municipality. End Bio Note.

XXXXXXXXXXXX Laments Police Corruption, and Lack of Resources and Support ...

¶23. (SBU) PolOff met separately with XXXXXXXXXXXX, the XXXXXXXXXXXX for the departmental capital, San Pedro de Ycumbandy, which is located approximately 65 miles east of Lima and Carumbey. XXXXXXXXXXXX said XXXXXXXXXXXX biggest obstacle as a XXXXXXXXXXXX was an unreliable, untrustworthy police force. XXXXXXXXXXXX the PNP." The second biggest obstacle XXXXXXXXXXXX faced was a lack of support from the government. XXXXXXXXXXXX cited the GOP's failure to

¶24. (SBU) XXXXXXXXXXXX described how corruption and a general lack of resources hindered efforts to combat marijuana production in San Pedro. The first difficulty was locating the marijuana. Since XXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXX colleagues did not have helicopter support, they had to rely on corrupt, local police in remote areas to tell them where the marijuana was growing. The vast majority of police withheld information to protect the growers in exchange for bribes. The second difficulty was reaching areas where marijuana was grown. Even when civic-minded residents reported marijuana cultivation, it was difficult to launch operations, given the lack of cooperation from the police and the inaccessibility of target sites (accessible in some instances only by motorcycle or helicopter). XXXXXXXXXXXX noted th

... and Describes the "Militarization" of Campesinos

¶25. (SBU) XXXXXXXXXXXX described the more radical campesinos in San Pedro as "militarized." XXXXXXXXXXXX said they have been indoctrinated to follow orders according to a military-style hierarchy of authority. XXXXXXXXXXXX said campesino organizers/agitators routinely manipulated campesinos' plight and exploited the government's lack of attention to the problem. XXXXXXXXXXXX did not know where the organizers/agitators learned their militaristic doctrine, since they were locals. XXXXXXXXXXXX ac

¶26. (SBU) XXXXXXXXXXXX opined that the current lull in radical campesino activity was just the calm before the next storm. XXXXXXXXXXXX expressed concern about possible unrest in January, when XXXXXXXXXXXX expects to indict four campesino leaders. XXXXXXXXXXXX cour "temporary calm" in the long-standing campesino crisis.

¶27. (SBU) Bio Note: XXXXXXXXXXXX appears less seasoned and knowledgeable than XXXXXXXXXXXX, but equally serious and honest. End Bio Note.

Conclusion

¶28. (SBU) Comment: The insights and opinions each of these officials offered put into perspective some of the region's challenges and priorities. Those challenges are security related, but also hinge on a lack of economic opportunity,

particularly as regards the land-dependent campesino population. A number of officials are trying in earnest to improve the situation, but their isolation, lack of resources, and an unreliable police force present very real obstacles on the path to establishing a significant state presence in the country's more remote areas. They are also handicapped by the central government's inability to meet impoverished, under-employed campesinos' demands for more land, support and social services. There is no indication that a major crisis is imminent, but national officials continue to neglect much of the countryside, allowing long-standing and deep-rooted problems to persist. Until the government finds a comprehensive solution to those problems, the potential for future unrest will remain. End Comment.

MERZ